

CITY OF BELLEVUE
EASTGATE/I-90
CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

April 7, 2011
5:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-108

MEMBERS PRESENT: Lindy Bruce, Dave Elliott, Jay Hamlin, Jeffrey Hummer, Francois Larrivee, Mark Ludtka, Tom Perea, Rob Pucher, Rachel Solemsaas, Jim Stanton, John Stokes, Cynthia Welti

MEMBERS ABSENT: Carrie Courter Blanton, Tom Bohman, David Vranizan

OTHERS PRESENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Franz Loewenherz, Kevin O'Neill, Transportation; Mike Bergstrom, Planning & Community Development

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. by Co-chair Hamlin who presided.

2. Approval of Minutes

A. March 3, 2011

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Mr. Stokes. Second was by Mr. Elliot. Motion carried.

3. Transportation Issues, Constraints & Opportunities

Transportation Assistant Director Kevin O'Neill provided a brief overview of what the presentation would cover.

Senior transportation planner Franz Loewenherz explained that the workshop in May will be a roll up the sleeves activity. The anticipation is the workshop will take about four hours.

Mr. Loewenherz said every planning initiative begins with a vision. In the case of the Eastgate/I-90 project much of the vision is articulated by the Council principles as well as by the feedback received to date from the CAC. The transportation vision involves implementing the land use vision by taking into account a large variety of factors. The overarching concept is the desire to improve traffic flow and mobility through strategically adding capacity where it makes sense to do so, operating roadways efficiently, and managing demand by providing choices.

A number of evaluative criteria are used to assess the health of the transportation system. Level of service is not the only one used, but it is an important one for assessing traffic operations at signalized intersections. The city is divided into 14 assessment districts called Mobility Management Areas (MMA). The level of service within each MMA is based on a metric of volume to capacity for each signalized intersection and a grade value with “A” denoting the highest drive comfort and little delay, and with “F” denoting a breakdown flow and excessive delays.

The community has expressed concerns about additional development in the Eastgate/I-90 area, primarily because of the impact it could have on the roadway network. While accommodating motorists with additional turn lanes and coordinated signal operations can improve traffic operations these arterial based strategies are by no means the only methods to improve the transportation system. The transit-intensive scenario developed for the Factoria Area Transportation Study showed that it could resolve most intersection congestion problems without additional roadway construction even with the addition of up to 800 new residential units. Other relevant studies include the 1992 East Bellevue Transportation Study and the 2002 Eastgate/I-90 Transportation Study. The concepts from each of those studies will be revisited; some have been implemented in whole, some in part, and some have not yet been implemented but are still on the books.

Mr. Loewenherz said the most pertinent study that relates to the Eastgate/I-90 project is the 2009 preliminary screening analysis. He explained that the analysis was conducted at the onset of the Eastgate/I-90 project to see how the transportation system would hold up to different land use scenarios, including some that were very robust. The process identified a number of potential strategies to consider as a starting point.

During the identification and analysis of alternatives phase of this project staff will be running the land use scenarios the CAC arrives at through a travel demand model that will project the 2030 level of service (LOS) values for the transportation network. Travel demand modeling at its simplest includes four elements: trip generation, distribution, mode choice and assignment. Every year the city conducts detailed traffic counts at intersections and along corridors; that is done to keep the data current with what is happening on the roads. The Eastgate/I-90 project has a 2030 horizon. The forecasted land use scenarios will be incorporated into the travel demand model, which will return information about the operational capacity of the roadway network under those conditions. The assumed transportation network is another variable that feeds into the modeling; it is informed by the Transportation Facilities Plan (TFP) as well as plans the state has for its mainlines.

The 2009 screening analysis was predicated on the 2008 LOS calculations for ten of the most heavily traveled intersections in the project area. Two land use scenarios were utilized: the first included one million square feet of office space above what current exists, even though the current zoning would not allow for achieving that much new office; and the second pushed the limits even further by including an additional 1.8 million square feet.

The modeling work demonstrated that by and large the intersections in the study area operate satisfactorily. One notable exception is the intersection of Factoria Boulevard and SE 36th Street which did not fare well under any of the 2030 land use scenarios. Other constraints showed up on 150th Avenue SE, both to the north and south of I-90.

Mr. Loewenherz explained that the work of the CAC will ultimately inform the Comprehensive Plan. At the conclusion of the study Comprehensive Plan and Land Use

Code amendment processes will be initiated. The recommendation will also inform the subarea transportation plan for the area. The Transportation Commission will then have the task of prioritizing the various proposed improvements relative to the wide range of other improvements needed throughout the city. Like the 1992 and 2002 earlier planning efforts the transportation recommendations in this project have the potential to be included in the City's TFP and ultimately CIP.

There are three projects in the project area that are in the TFP. TFP-162 and TFP-195 were both identified in the 1992 East Bellevue Transportation Study; portions of TFP-195 have been implemented. TFP-154 came out of the 2002 study.

Commissioner Larrivee asked how well the modeling work done in the past has actualized in terms of what can be seen on the streets. Mr. O'Neill answered that travel demand models are like any other quantitative tool in that their output is only as good as the input. The city has always focused on making the inputs as strong as possible. The land use inputs are significant, and the city has a very detailed zone structure that is specific to the amount of existing square feet for each land use; that baseline is added to in developing forecasts. On the transportation network side, projects and improvements are coded in along with transit routes, transit headways, and elements such as parking costs which are known to drive transit ridership. However, no model can be fully accurate in forecasting the future. The annual intersection and corridor counts are used to calibrate the model.

Mr. Loewenherz said one of the considerations in developing a recommendation for the Eastgate/I-90 study area will be the assumptions for the I-90 mainline, a project that is entirely outside the control of the city. What happens on the freeway will have a profound impact on local arterial operations.

Answering a question asked by Ms. Bruce, Mr. O'Neill explained that for concurrency purposes, the evening peak period covers two hours. The level of service predictions are based on implementation of the various identified system improvements.

Mr. Elliott pointed out that 20 years ago no one was forecasting having 10,000 people living on the plateaus. That growth has substantially changed the traffic flow, both on the freeway and on local streets used as cut-through routes. Mr. Loewenherz agreed and pointed out that the current Puget Sound Regional Council forecasts do not assume the level of development that Issaquah is contemplating in its plans.

Mr. Loewenherz said that when we look to the future, we see that by 2030 the current traffic volumes along the I-90 travel shed are projected to increase significantly with the projected increase in both households and jobs. The addition of auxiliary lane improvements to I-90 that are being contemplated by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) would relieve the severity and duration of congestion, as well as the distance over which the congestion occurs. The improvements are not, however included in the city's baseline 2030 model because the concepts have not yet been adopted. The addition of an additional roundabout at the I-90 westbound off ramp at Lakemont Boulevard would greatly facilitate left turns, both to the interstate in the westbound direction and from the off ramp to areas to the south. That concept along with the addition of a proposed new slip lane is also not assumed in the city's model for the same reason.

At a minimum, steps need to be taken to make visible how to get from the interstate to other areas, to the north in particular. That point was made clear by the public in early outreach efforts. The state was listening and has set aside some money to improve

wayfinding in the corridor. This effort is presently underway and should be regarded as an early win for this Eastgate/I-90 Land Use and Transportation Project.

Mr. O'Neill said the city typically uses its subarea plan updates to advocate for improvements to state systems. By including in the preferred alternative improvements to I-90 that will have benefits for the corridor, the city will have a foothold for working with WSDOT and the state legislature in advocating for the projects.

Mr. Stanton commented that in addition to big projects aimed at improving the state system, some very simple things could be done that would make things better. The Eastgate area serves as an entry into Bellevue and the region, and simply mowing the interchanges and removing the blackberries would make the gateway more pleasing and welcoming.

With regard to the arterial system, Mr. Loewenherz said a wide range of improvements will be looked at to respond to the Council directive to enhance the Eastgate corridor's economic vitality without degrading mobility in other parts of the city and ensure that it continues to contribute to the diversity of the city's economic mix. He said 150th Avenue SE south of I-90 has a fair amount of traffic in the northbound direction in the morning peak and in the southbound direction in the evening peak. Much of the congestion that occurs is directly related to the fact that people living south of I-90 have limited options for accessing Eastgate or the parts of Bellevue north of I-90. During the evening peak 1800 vehicles per hour enter the I-90 on-ramp from SE 37 Street and are metered to keep the mainline flowing. The lack of queue space causes traffic to back up on 150th Avenue SE all the way to SE 38th Street. Improvements were identified in the 1992 East Bellevue Transportation Study, but they were not scoped into the CIP until 2003. Funding limitations triggered the need to scale back on the project, though some very good improvements were made. Widening on the north-side of Eastgate Plaza and the I-90 off ramp was not done; those elements are included in the current TFP-195. The 150th Avenue SE corridor continues to show congestion under the 2030 land use scenarios, though the 2009 Preliminary Screening Analysis concepts have the potential to improve level of service from E and F to C at the 150th Ave SE and SE 37 Street intersection.

Mr. Stanton said it is both interesting and unique that the 150th Avenue SE interchange with I-90 gives drivers multiple alternatives for getting to the same place. Typically, freeways are developed to give drivers only a single option. The design allows drivers to make choices that ultimately impinge on other movements. Mr. Loewenherz agreed. He said the city had discussions with WSDOT which agreed that the cloverleaf designs are a bit antiquated. A different interchange is warranted but well beyond the state's budget capacity.

Mr. Loewenherz called attention to 150th Ave SE and SE Eastgate Way and noted that in both the morning and evening peak the intersection goes to LOS F in the 2030 modified land use scenario evaluated in the 2009 Preliminary Screening Analysis. The predominant movements are northbound in the morning and southbound in the evening. In 2005 there was a project to widen the southbound lanes to the Bellevue College entrance. Adding a third southbound lane further south is reflected in TFP-154. The 2009 screening analysis proposed reconfiguring the 150th Ave SE and SE Eastgate Way intersection with an additional through lane and a receiving lane along with the additional southbound lane. The intersection is particularly challenging for pedestrians and cyclists so the 2009 analysis proposed enhancing the intersection for these user groups.

One tool not contemplated by any previous planning effort is the concept of managing access. Limiting turning movements from driveways has been shown to improve the

safety record as well as the throughput of a corridor. The Sunset Village driveway fronting SE Eastgate Way offers a number of entrance/egress options for drivers, the result of which has been a history of collisions; 12 of the 14 collisions over the past five years have involved drivers attempting to turn eastbound onto Eastgate Way and colliding with a westbound vehicle. Access management has been implemented on Factoria Boulevard which has resulted in a significant reduction in the overall number of collisions. Roundabouts have been effectively used in corridors with boulevard treatments to limit driveway access to right-in/right-out only. Going from I-90 to westbound 148th Avenue SE is dicey. There are two stop lights and two turns. Congestion could be eliminated if there were no stop lights or turning movements, which a roundabout would yield.

Mr. Loewenherz clarified that traffic signals can be made to work very well. Indeed, Bellevue is at the forefront of making use of adaptive traffic signals and was the first in the state to implement the technology. The incorporation of adaptive traffic signals on the Burnside corridor in Gresham, OR has been very successful in reducing travel times. Regardless of whether roundabouts are installed, adaptive traffic signal technology will be incorporated for most of the arterials in the Eastgate area by 2012.

The current TFP identifies an additional left-turn lane at the I-90 off ramp at the 156th Avenue SE gateway intersection. Since we are not constrained by space at this intersection (given WSDOT ROW); an alternative option for this intersection would be to implement a roundabout at this location. With planted medians constructed all the way to 150th Avenue SE and Eastgate Way, turning movements can be restricted.

Bellevue was among the first in the state to implement roundabouts. Around the country the use of roundabouts have successfully reduced corridor travel times and improved safety. Roundabouts do cost more up front given the need to acquire right-of-way, but their long-term costs are lower. The list of benefits includes reduced air pollution and intersections not subject to power outages.

The Eastgate interchange could be redesigned to include five different roundabouts. With planted medians and additional green space, a more welcoming gateway could be created while allowing for much improved traffic flow. A roundabout in Clearwater, Florida, has a multilane configuration and metering on some legs; the facility can accommodate 56,000 vehicles and 6,000 pedestrians per day and has been in successful operation for many years.

Mr. Stanton asked what percentage of southbound traffic on 148th Avenue SE elects to go westbound on I-90, which clearly would be commuter traffic and not local traffic. Mr. Loewenherz said the modeling staff have looked at that. He said it is safe to say that at least half of the travel through the interchange area is interstate related. Mr. Stanton suggested that part of the issue in the area is traffic that comes from somewhere else. One question in need of an answer is whether or not solving the issues outside the boundaries of the study area would directly or indirectly resolve some of the issues within the study area.

Mr. Loewenherz noted that the Council directive relative to the area's infrastructure includes evolving it into a high-performing multimodal system with increased transit service. The city plays a limited role with regard to how much it can influence transit implementation, but it has very large role to play in terms of making land use decisions and assigning priority through signal operations along arterials. There was a 171 percent increase in transit ridership between 2000 and 2005 following the expansion of the Eastgate park and ride, ridership has continued to grow but at a slower pace. The area

has not, however, met its modesplit target; the Eastgate area non drive-alone modesplit stands at 27 percent, while the target is 35 percent.

The public has indicated that the park and ride is great for accessing regional service, but there is not enough service within the study area itself. There certainly are constraints standing in the way of achieving more service, not the least of which is the current budget situation. Transit providers are utilizing various criteria in determining how to allocate their resources; land use is one of the attributes that gets a sizeable share of the overall point values. The Eastgate corridor scores well in terms of jobs, but not so well in terms of households.

The college is clearly a major draw area for all-day transit service. Serving the campus is challenging because of the terrain and because of where the park and ride is located. The 2009 screening analysis identified a concept of routing buses from the Park and Ride to/through the campus via Snoqualmie River Road. This more direct bus service would carry with it capital costs (associated with reconstructing the roadway to accommodate the weight of buses), but it could result in annual operating savings of as much as half a million dollars for King County Transit. It would be admittedly difficult to make the changes given the adjacent condominium development, the terrain and the limited number of roadways.

Mr. Loewenherz said the public has voiced the opinion that the city should begin planning right away for Sound Transit III. While the city has its hands full with Sound Transit II, some of those monies are set aside for planning for the next phase. The Eastgate/I-90 study does offer an opportunity to at least get started with thinking about what might occur as light rail comes to and through the corridor. Clearly, in moving toward higher capacity transit solutions, it will be necessary to have a higher density of jobs and housing.

The study will not include an alignment analysis, but it will include some hypothetical station locations and looking at what it would take to get people to and from the facilities. Connectivity is not an easy thing to achieve, but the city's GIS system can be used to determine generally how well each hypothetical station could be accessed. One issue is the fact that just a thousand feet away from the Eastgate park and ride where there could be a future light rail station is the unincorporated area that has some 550 houses, all of which have poor access to the station.

Mr. Loewenherz noted that the public had indicated a desire to see painted bike lanes on the frontage road. He reported that during the past year through the pavement overlay program bike lanes were added on SE 36th Street to the 142nd Avenue SE bridge crossing by simply adjusting the lane widths slightly. The prevailing opinion, however, is in favor of full separation of cars and bicycles given that the largest percentage of the bike riding public are not hardcore riders. Jurisdictions that have embraced the concept of off-street bike paths, ten feet in width minimum, with two feet of separation on either side, have seen significant increases in the number of people using the facilities. In 2002 the vision for the greenway included locating it on the north side of I-90 and looping through the Bellevue College campus before winding its way to a connection with the I-90 trail. For a number of reasons, the concept was revised for the 2009 ped-bike plan and shown on the south side of I-90. Regardless of where the trail ends up, the city acknowledges that cyclists will need to be accommodated on both sides of the freeway. At high traffic locations, grade separated crossings should be considered.

The study area also offers a lack of pedestrian facilities. There are instances along the frontage roads where there are no sidewalks at all. Sidewalks exist in other areas but they

are inadequate for various reasons. Some improvements are planned and set to be constructed, but more facilities are needed.

Mr. Loewenherz said much has been heard about connectivity being an issue for more than just pedestrians and cyclists. The freeways offer good connectivity, but what is needed is better connections within the Eastgate area and on both sides of the freeway. LEED-ND flows from the concept of making communities more sustainable, and a hallmark of the designation is compact, complete and connected communities. More intersection density makes it easier for the public to get around. The 2009 preliminary screening analysis identified potential improvements that might be realized, though some would be challenging to implement due to terrain, environmental considerations and cost.

Responding to a comment made by Ms. Welti, Mr. Loewenherz commented that putting the Greenway trail on the north side of the freeway will mean dealing with some very real challenges. At the same time, however, the north side is where the greatest land use potential exists. A number of options will be brought forward for consideration, but the alignment needs to be identified so the project can be positioned to go after grant funding to do the design work.

Mr. O'Neill said the CAC will be asked to come up with a vision for the study area. If the group identifies projects that will have great benefit or that are tied to a particular land use concept, it would be fair for the CAC to highlight the projects as being of particular importance in addition to being part of overall package. The vision will be constrained by four elements: what is already on the ground, what the market will allow, environmental constraints, and the transportation system.

Mr. Stanton commented that the neighborhoods should be asked to weigh in on prioritizing projects once they are identified. It takes a long time to develop and implement plans and too often the locals never see the plans realized. With a little extra work, it should be possible to show near-term results resulting from interim steps toward the long-term vision.

Mr. Elliott pointed out that somewhere in the archives of the Transportation Commission there is a document with four pages or so of acronyms used by transportation planners. He said it would be useful for the group to have it in hand. He agreed with Mr. Stanton that once the project list is developed, the city should seek to pick off the low-hanging fruit first as a show of good faith for the property owners in the study area.

Mr. Loewenherz noted that the city has a good track record of making projects happen, and is particularly adept at taking advantage of opportunities as they arise.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Larrivee, Mr. O'Neill said by and large the city avoids the "build it and they will come" approach in favor of listening to what communities have to say about priorities and system gaps. The SR-520 trail project filled a gap, and the I-90 trail could be classified similarly.

Mr. Ludtka commented that as the downtown becomes more and more built out and congested the increased number of drivers using I-90 coming from areas like Issaquah will want to do their business in Eastgate instead. The Bel-Red corridor will be fed primarily from SR-520. The flanking elements to the downtown should be Bel-Red and Eastgate.

Ms. Solemsaas said building ped-bike facilities is the sustainable thing to do. As the CAC plans for the future, it should focus on what will make the most sense for the

community from a sustainability standpoint.

4. Public Comment – None

5. Adjourn

Commissioner Hamlin adjourned the meeting at 7:37 p.m.